



The Insider

www.senate.mi.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

March 4, 2005

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

Mickey's Letter Bag: Free Gonzo?

Dear Mickey:

Bless you for stepping in to help this handicapped talented man. Who in heaven's name on Roseville council has such a grudge against this man to spend all the city's resources to put an accomplished painter in jail? The Macomb Daily tells us of his offense with political signs in his window????? People as far away as Bloomington Hills told me they came to see his painting of Diana and shopped in Roseville and ate at a restaurant. All because of the "free advertising" Gonzo gets from those who oppose his paintings. How ridiculous to spend the City's money trying to put a handicapped painter out of business. I applaud the man for not going on welfare instead of practicing his painting that is his living. The public enjoys it according to all whom I come in contact with--- so who is nit picking on the council to "get this guy"??? For goodness sakes they need to get a life. Would Graffiti please them more? NOT THE VOTER'S, you always seem to go to bat for the "little guy" so have my thanks.

Best Regards,
Charlotte Horan
Roseville

“What does Roseville artist Edward Stross have in common with famous human rights leaders like Gandhi and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.? Not much, it turns out...

“He fled to a hospital when he discovered he was to be jailed for 30 days. Stross, who has made a name for himself over the years not so much for his art but with his defiance of the city zoning and sign ordinances, showed his true colors when he was unwilling to face the consequences of his crusade...

Stross is free to paint what he wants, when he wants and just about anywhere he wants, except on a single exterior wall of his commercial building on Gratiot. He even signed an agreement with city

officials after a years-long feud over paintings on the wall in which he said he would not paint anything containing genitalia or words on the wall...

There is no absolute freedom of speech in this country, despite what the first amendment says. The courts throughout our nation's history have placed limitations on the absoluteness of that right. Stross wants it both ways. He wants to claim the freedom to paint what he wants on the wall, but he signed an agreement limiting some of his supposed rights, and now wants to renege on his word...

This is not a battle over freedom of expression. It's a simple city code dispute over the actions of one sore loser who doesn't want to abide by the same rules that his neighbors live by...." (*Philip Van Hulle, Macomb Daily, 20A, Feb. 27, 2005*)

Mickey's Blog: When Is Art Worth 30 days in the Slammer?

Roseville artist Edward "Gonzo" Stross is my neighbor. His famous mural is across the street from my District Office at Utica and Gratiot in the historic Roseville Theatre Building. I can look out my window every day and see his painting. Personally, I like it. Every few years he makes significant changes to it, and he frequently adds new elements. It's almost like a community bulletin board.

Many people in the area also enjoy seeing his work, because everyone can have an opinion about art, and the mural gives us a shared experience to gossip about, argue over, and pontificate about without coming to blows. I think that is a great thing. That wall interests and engages us. Gonzo's art provides one of the few occasions for a good argument with your friends, while still remaining friends.

That is priceless.

Gonzo has had a long running feud with the Roseville City Council. I have largely stayed out of these disputes. I have my own battles to fight in State Government, and I follow the principle that you should stay out of other people's disputes unless you are affected or have a very good reason. The Council doesn't need me to tell them how to run their business. I might express my opinion, privately, if asked. But it's not wise to put your nose into everyone's business.

I would have stayed out of the dispute, but then Gonzo got sentenced to jail. At that point, I asked the ACLU to step in and take the case because I do not believe the government should have the power to put Gonzo in jail for painting his mural. Ex-prosecutor Carl Marlinga is now on the case.

Whether the government should have the power to deprive Gonzo of his liberty for painting that mural is an important question that deserves strict scrutiny. I think the fundamental question is whether the government has the right to regulate decorative painting on a citizen's private property. The City has argued that this mural is a sign, and therefore subject to the City's sign ordinance. I believe that ordinance is justified for advertising, but not for a decorative mural.

There's probably a limit to decoration. Even if it is your private property, you shouldn't be able to paint just anything on it. But by what right can the government say you can't paint LOVE or a copy of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel?

I sympathize with the judge. Gonzo is sometimes his own worst enemy. When he said he wouldn't change his painting and no one could make him, the judge didn't have much choice. I just don't think it ever should have got that far.

The whole episode puts Roseville in a bad light. I hope that a more constructive solution can be found to the dispute. When Gonzo got in trouble for painting some graffiti on an abandoned property, he was sentenced to painting a beautiful mural of the Statue of Liberty on the VFW on Gratiot.

That was constructive. Sacred Heart is talking about having him paint some murals inside the Church. That would be a way of channeling Gonzo's creative talents in a positive direction.

And it would help heal a fractured community.

What's your take? You can view Gonzo's mural at www.aclumich.org/attachments/gonzowall.jpg.

What Do You Think?

Governor Jennifer Granholm has proposed a ban on the use of credit scores to determine insurance rates. Opponents say credit scoring is a legitimate way to establish premiums, and that if they are not allowed to use credit scoring, most people's insurance premiums will rise.

With bills to reject the rule having been introduced both in the Michigan Senate and House last week, I expect to vote on this issue shortly and I would like to receive your feedback on this matter. Please feel free to e-mail me on this subject and I will publish some of your letters in the next issue of the Insider E-Newsletter.

Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Every other Tuesday at 6:05 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 18)

*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

Coffee Hours

*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

Mar. 7, April 4 7-9 p.m.	Mar. 14 10 a.m.-noon
Location: Sterling Heights Public Library (40255 Dodge Park) Sterling Heights	Location: District Office (28311 Utica Road, on the corner of Gratiot) Roseville

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